

TOMI ENGDAHL

the man behind epanorama.net

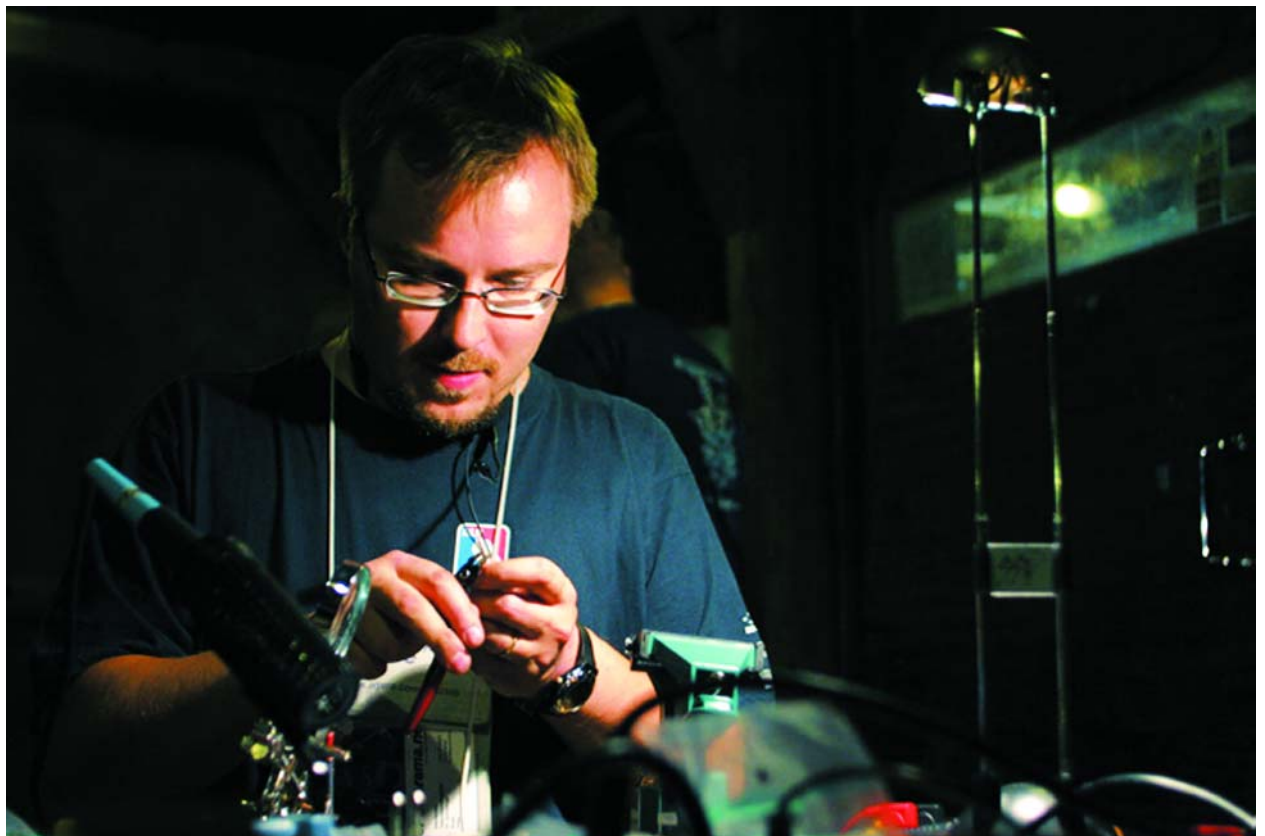


Photo: Oleg Hartsenko Copyright: Assembly Organizing

Have you got www.epanorama.net bookmarked? If not, you should, because for many years Tomi Engdahl's website has been a highly respected on-line reference work as well as a source of inspiration for many electronics enthusiasts. This time we decided to interview the website maker rather than review his product.

It's hard to think of you having started out with a hobby other than electronics.

I don't remember at what age I started. My father was an engineer and I also got interested in all kinds of technology at an early age. Somehow I got the hang of electronics and yes I also took radios apart as a kid!

At a relatively early age you decided to study Electrical Engineering — did you consider alternative studies or careers?

When I decided to go to Helsinki University of Technology I was not completely sure if I should concentrate on computer science or electrical engineering. I studied in the Department of Computer Science and graduated in that field. I was sure however to select topics that would give me some knowledge of electrical engineering as well. I remember many studies related to signal processing, computer hardware design and data communications were organized by a department called Electrical and Communications Engineering.

Why did you choose Helsinki University?

Today Helsinki University of Technology (HUT) is not actually in Helsinki but in Otaniemi near Espoo, just a few kilometres west of Helsinki. Anyway, my cousin studied there and HUT had a good reputation. It was also just a half hour drive from my home. Later I moved to the campus.

Where you plunged into student life, I suppose?

Sure, for one thing I assisted in organising campus events. One night as I was helping a DJ with the lighting system it turned out that the next DJ wasn't going to show up and I ended up playing records for some time that evening. I got good feedback from the crowd and decided to try again. Later I teamed up with a friend and we gigged at many student parties.

Did the University also trigger your Internet adventures?

Yes, the Internet activities actually started in 1990 but before that I had been active on a BBS for a couple of years. I guess I started writing texts on PC hardware around 1989. I wanted to know more about PC hardware and programming, but there was a lack of information sources and not much material written in Finnish. I then started writing documents collecting and summarising information I found in various sources like PC hardware and component data books. My first texts were written in Finnish and covered PC parallel and serial ports. These texts were updated a few years later.

The epanorama website is also frequently updated. Do you handle the updates yourself?

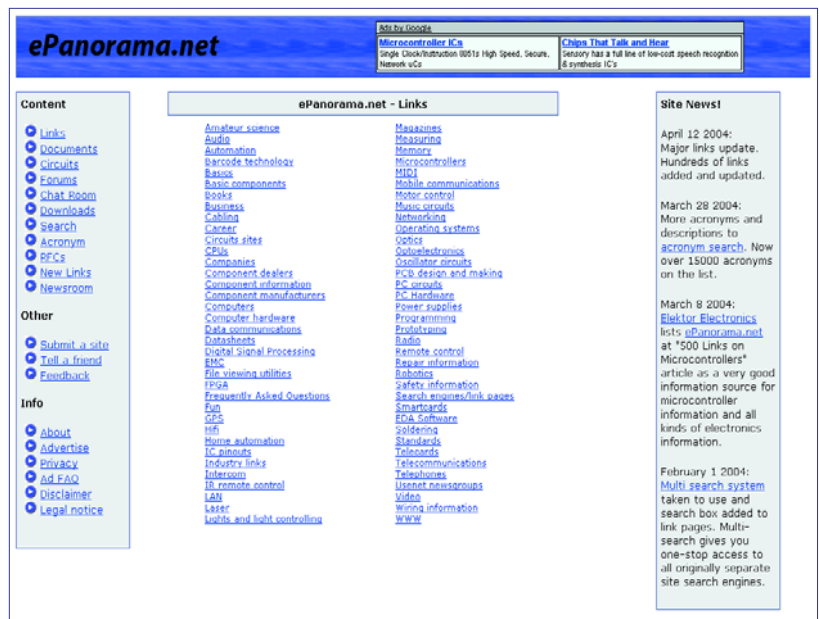
I used to, but nowadays it's a joint effort. The site change from my personal home page on the University webserver to 'epanorama.net' involved two friends with whom I founded ELH Communications Ltd. Together we had to find a suitable name for the website that was still available to register as a domain name. The name change was effected between 1998 and 1999.

Where is site hosted today?

In the US of A. We employ one primary server from Rackhost and one backup. Although the webhosting company has to be paid for the traffic generated by the site, the facilities offered are generous. For example, we are now able to run scripts, which was impossible on the University webserver. Advertising is used to recover some of our running costs.

Can you give us some web statistics, please?

Sure, at the beginning of 2004 we recorded a daily average of 14,615 visitors browsing 51,562 pages. Total traffic for February 2004 amounted to 67 gigabytes.



Impressive and surely an incentive to generate even more traffic?

Time and resources are limiting factors but we strive to add more links, more material to the site's information databases and so on. At the moment the main development is to improve the website administration which will hopefully make updating the site easier and faster. Once things are running smoothly, the database system may also be used for more advanced functions like searching and rating of links. I also have some ideas on how the schematics and documents could be improved so eventually we hope to be able to verify the operation of circuits before they appear on the site, instead of promising amazing things that never happen.

Does your job relate in any way to the website you run?

I work in a company called Netcontrol (www.netcontrol.fi) which develops, markets and supplies monitoring and control systems for energy production and distribution. I also write articles for Prosessori magazine (www.prosessori.fi), for example, a regular feature about good websites I've come across. Updating and extending my own website and writing these articles allows me to use the same link information for both.

So what's in your own Favourites folder then?

Ah well here are just a few pages I bookmarked and visit every day:

www.google.com (when you need to find something that's not already on www.epanorama.net)
www.prosessori.fi (admittedly only of interest if you can read Finnish). By the way, Prosessori contains licensed Elektor articles in Finnish!
www.slashdot.org (for daily computer news)
www.dilbert.com and www.userfriendly.org (for daily fun)

Finally, what are must-see articles on epanorama.net?

Actually I'm proud of quite a few articles. Maybe 'Ground loop problems and how to get rid of them' deserves a special mention because of the good feedback it received it different forums.

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